

thaw by aelescribe

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Bisexual Male Character, F/M, M/M, Past Lucas Sinclair/Mike Wheeler

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Summary:

Lucas and Eleven have an important conversation.

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Lucas's fingers laced through Max's just feels right. He can't explain it. Their conversation is effortless and their affection cheeky, yet warm. He loves to watch her face soften for him. See her nose scrunch when she tries—and fails—to keep a smile at bay. Look into her bright, clear, honest eyes. They keep each other grounded. Whenever Lucas gets too in his head, or Max draws too far away from everyone, they helped coax each other back down to Earth.

Right now, Max is drifting. He's afraid.

Her eyes are fixed at some point past his shoulder. His gaming tangent trails off as he tries to get a sense of what she's seeing, what she's feeling. Lucas spins them suddenly; she lets out a surprised yell, almost a laugh, and they switch places. "What was *that* for?" Max huffs, but her nose is scrunching up, and Lucas knows it's okay.

He gets a glimpse of what she was staring at. Eleven averts her gaze with a sense of shame. Mike's head seems to bow, even though Lucas can't see his expression. But he's gotten pretty good at reading Mike without seeing his face. His anxiety claws at him, old thoughts and feelings rising anew.

"Hey. What's wrong?" Max asks, drawing him from his thoughts.

"I should be asking you that," he says. "You've been staring at them for a while, now."

Max bites her lip. "I... I just don't..." She groans with frustration. "It's stupid. Forget it." She tries to leave but Lucas places his hands firmly--and respectfully--on her hips to keep her anchored. Their eyes lock, hearts racing, cheeks a bit flushed.

"S-sorry," he says quickly. But he doesn't let go of her. She doesn't move away. Ignoring the thumping in his heart, Lucas maneuvers back to the topic at hand. "I know that Elle's been pretty cold towards you. I'm sorry."

She keeps her eyes on their feet while they sway. "It's Mike. I

thought... maybe now that Elle is back, he would be okay with me being in the party. He would know I'm not trying to replace her or anything--and I never have been, but he still hates me."

Lucas sighs. "Mike's been... difficult, this year. He'll come around. He's just stubborn." He always is and always has been. It's something Lucas loathes and admires.

"You don't get it, Lucas. I don't care what people think about me. I *don't*," Max swallows hard and struggles to speak. "But I like you guys. I really do. I want to be friends with you--all of you. Not to mention that saving the world seriously boosts my street cred." Lucas chuckles and that seems to give her the courage to continue, "I just thought... I mean, I don't expect Elle to like me. I know how hard it is to actually trust people. I still don't. But maybe together, we..." She shakes her head and scoffs, brushing herself off. "I probably shouldn't have said anything. Let's just forget this ever happened."

"No," Lucas insists. He hates when Max self deprecates herself. Her family taught her what she says doesn't matter, and she learned how to make herself small. He understands it's one of her many strategies to cope in that household. Lucas prays for the day when Max forgets how to hurt herself. "You're completely right. They're acting hurtful even though you haven't hurt them, and it isn't fair to you. I care about both of them and I care about you. If you were being unreasonable, I'd tell you. It's not your fault, Max." His voice becomes softer and he brushes a few fiery strands from her face. Mike has once again become the primary source of his frustration. It kills Lucas to see him like this, and to see Elle taking after it. He *loves* them and he wants to help them as much as he does Max. "I'll talk to them, okay? If you're okay with that."

"I don't want you to be caught in the middle of this," Max says. "It's my problem to deal with."

"Mike and Elle are my friends too. To be honest, Mike hasn't been himself since Elle left. He's getting there. He's really trying. He just needs someone to talk a little sense into him." Lucas has watched Mike deteriorate in front of him this past year and every fading bit of his wealth of hope pierced Lucas' heart like a dagger. He knows Mike better than most--knows he's hurting, healing, and a little ridiculous.

It's understandable. But this funk has gone on long enough. "I'll be back in a bit, okay?"

Max absently nods. She refuses to meet his gaze. She's closing in again. He takes her hand, squeezes it gently. "Thank you," she chokes out. "You don't have to do this for me."

"I want to. I care about you, Max. And besides, I think I'm the only one who can talk some sense into them. They're a bit wrapped up in each other, in case you hadn't noticed." This makes her laugh that cute, snorty laugh that Lucas loves. He kisses her cheek and goes, catching a glimpse of her cheeks warming to match her hair in color.

He catches Eleven and Mike at the punch bowl. "Hey, guys!"

"Lucas," Eleven greets with a smile.

"How's it going?" Mike claps him on the back and Lucas feels a knot in his stomach. It's worn and faded, but it's never come undone. He doesn't know if it ever will.

"Good, good. I just wanted to talk to you guys. Well, Elle, actually. I wanted to talk to you, first. We haven't really had a chance to catch up, just the two of us."

Eleven nods eagerly. She takes Mike's hand, bids him a warm smile, and goes off with Lucas. His palms sweat. He loosens his tie while they climb to the top of the bleachers for some privacy. "Dancing is fun," she says. "Being with all of you is fun."

Lucas nods. "We're really glad you get to spend at least one night out. I can't imagine what it's like being cooped up with *Hopper* as your only company."

Eleven laughs, soft and low. "Difficult. But fun, too."

Lucas takes a moment to regard Eleven. Her hair curls just under her ears. Her cheeks are firmer. Her eyes haven't changed; they're that same dark storm that scared Lucas to death a year ago. "Hey, Eleven, we need to talk. It's important. It's about Max."

Immediately, Eleven bristles. "Not fun."

“Yeah, I know it’s not fun for you. It’s not fun for her, either. Mike won’t let her into the group and you aren’t really helping. She wants to be friends with both of you.”

“Don’t want her to be friends with Mike.” Eleven’s fists clench at her sides.

“Why not, Elle?” Lucas asks.

Her anger melts to uncertainty, loosening her fists, her furrowed brow. Her hands settle in her lap. “If she’s friends with him, I can’t be friends with him.”

“You can both be friends with Mike. It’s not mutually exclusive.”

“She made him laugh,” Eleven bursts, then quickly covers her mouth. Her woeful eyes make their way to the center of the gymnasium. “Right there. And it made me so--so-- *mad* . I tripped her. And I didn’t talk to Mike. I ran away.”

“When was this?”

“A few days before I saw you all again. I didn’t tell Mike. I didn’t want to make him upset.”

Lucas lets out a long sigh and runs his hands through his hair. Suddenly, he understands all too well what Elle is feeling. “Oh geez, Elle... I’m sure that wasn’t what you thought. Mike doesn’t like Max, not like he likes you.” *He’s only ever had eyes for you*, Lucas thinks. He can’t help it. He pushes the thought away.

“Max likes *you*.”

It’s Lucas’s turn to feel embarrassed. He rests his burning cheek on his palm, sheepishly muttering. When he collects himself again, Elle’s laughter not helping in the slightest, he’s serious. “I know what you feel right now, Elle. I really do.” When Eleven looks doubtful, he continues, “You’re afraid that she’ll replace you. She’ll become better friends with Mike. He’ll stop thinking about you. Stop caring about you. He’ll forget about you.” Dredging this up makes his heart heavy, his shoulders sagging with the weight of his past grief.

This makes her upset and she covers her ears. "Stop it," she whispers. He doesn't want to ruin her one night out, but this has to be said. "Lucas, why--"

"I'm right, Elle. You think you're not good enough. You think you'll lose him because of it. That's why you're afraid. I know. I was afraid of the same thing last year with *you*." The words are tumbling out and Lucas can't stop them. His confession makes Eleven confused, but as he continues, realization dawns on her. He feels sick but he can't stop talking. "I care--I cared about Mike, a lot. Like you do. And I knew he wouldn't feel the same, but there was always some part of me hoping he would." Even now, the tiniest hope lingers in the back of his head. *Just in case*, it always whispers when he's on the verge of forgetting. "And then you showed up. He only knew you for days, but you were closer to him than I ever could be. And it made me *furious*. I was so scared and so angry. Of you. At you. At Mike. But I knew I couldn't be, really, because it wasn't either of your faults. Even now, I hate that I have to tell you this, I was so *stupid*--anyway... I got over myself, got to know you, found out you're an amazing person, and now you're one of my best friends. Mike wasn't the only one who missed you when you were gone."

They were silent for a long time after that.

"I'm not angry at you. I know *exactly* how you feel," Lucas says. His eyes water, all memories of his boyish infatuation and hopeful pining rising to the forefront of his mind. "I didn't want to give you a chance. And look where we are now... Please, just think about giving Max that same chance. Besides, you two have a lot in common. She doesn't come from a very good home. I think you could both help each other." Lucas doesn't elaborate. He respects Max and won't divulge what is hers to share. He respects Eleven and won't bring up anything painful from her past. He clasps his hands together, tense. If Elle cries, Lucas will have to take himself out. He won't get such mercy from Mike or Hopper--or Eleven herself. "I hope I didn't ruin your night--"

Elle crushes the breath out of him with a tight hug. Lucas wheezes and hugs her back. "I'm sorry," she whispers. He doesn't know what she's apologizing for. Max. Mike. His feelings. "I'm sorry, Lucas. I'm sorry."

“It’s okay, Elle. You’re okay.” They let their embrace gradually fade until Eleven is just holding Lucas’s hand.

“I want to go talk to Mike,” she says, determined. “I want to make things right.”

“That’s a good start. He’s got a thick skull, and you’re going to need all your psychic powers to crack it.” Lucas laughs and Eleven doesn’t quite understand, but she laughs too. He scratches the back of his head, suddenly nervous, and clears his throat. “But... don’t tell him I used to have a crush on him. Please.” His voice gets softer and softer, and he can’t bear to look at Elle. Her sympathy is too much.

Elle gives his hand a gentle squeeze. “Okay. I promise.”

Relief washes over him. “Elle, thank you. I mean it. You’re a good friend.” As they make their way down the bleachers, Max strides towards them. She and Elle share a long look. The latter turns to Lucas, who gives her an encouraging nod.

She musters up the smallest of smiles that probably seems forced to Max, but Lucas assures her with his own that it’s genuine. Elle thrusts out her hand. “Hello, Max. I’ve heard a lot about you.”

Max’s eyes light up and Lucas’s heart beats with renewed rhythm.

Author's Note:

In my wishing (read: waiting) for a reconciliation/apology from Mike and Eleven for their coldness towards Max, I realized the best person to talk to Elle about it would be Lucas. They were both in pretty similar situations. I took it a step further because I think the idea of Mike/Lucas is cute (unrequited in this story, but maybe I’ll write a oneshot for them in the future). Plus, I would love an episode dedicated to her relationship with Lucas and Dustin. And I think Elle and Max would be good, important friends for each other. So all of that culminated into this.

Hope you all enjoyed! Feel free to leave a comment,

too C:Let me know if you're interested in a continuation. This is an idea I'd like to explore some more.